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NEWS RELEASE

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FIFTEEN BAKERSFIELD RESIDENTS CHARGED WITH FRAUD IN CONNECTION WITH FUNDS INTENDED FOR VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA

FRESNO- United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that late yesterday indictments were returned for fifteen Bakersfield residents charged with participating in a wire fraud scheme to defraud the American Red Cross of funds intended for victims of Hurricane Katrina. Each of the defendants was previously charged by way of a criminal complaint. Eleven of those defendants have been arrested and previously appeared in federal court. They are: TRENT JERMAINE PRESLEE, age 33, AMINAH RANDLE, age 19, ROBERT JOHNSON, age 23, MIKO SHANNIA NOBLES, age 22, TONJUA RANDLE, age 39, SHEENA PORTER, age 21, STANLEY LEWIS, age 44, CANDICE BROWN, age 20, NASHIMA JOHNSON, age 27, MARISELA GONZALEZ, age 27, and MORGAN WINSLOW, age 33. The remaining four defendants, ELIZABETH RAY, age 48, HAROLD DENNIS OATS, age 26, DAVID ROBERT CANDELARIA, age 37, and MARIETTA SNOWDEN, age 48, have not yet been arrested. Of the eleven previously arrested defendants, defendants TRENT PRESLEE, ROBERT JOHNSON and STANLEY LEWIS remain in custody. The remaining eight have been ordered to appear in federal court in Fresno on either October 14 or October 19, 2005.

All of these cases are being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Bakersfield, California, with the assistance of the Bakersfield Police Department. The cases are being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office in Fresno, California. The investigation is continuing.

United States Attorney Scott commented that the investigation is on-going and more arrests are anticipated. "Those who would victimize charitable organizations such as the Red Cross, whose purpose is to provide assistance to victims of natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, are hereby on notice that they will be ferreted out and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales recently created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force -- chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division -- includes members from the FBI, the Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office of the United States Attorneys, and the Federal Trade Commission, among others.

According to Assistant United States Attorneys Mark E. Cullers, Jonathan B. Conklin and Stanley A. Boone, who are prosecuting the cases, the indictments allege that the defendants participated in a plan or scheme to defraud the Red Cross by submitting or causing others to submit a fraudulent claim through the Red Cross call center located in Bakersfield, California. The complaint explains that the Red Cross, in an attempt to expedite payments to actual victims of Hurricane Katrina, has set up at least two call centers in the United States, the largest of which is located in Bakersfield. According to the complaint, when a person contacts the call center to request assistance, their personal information, including an address within the area affected by the hurricane, is verified by call center employees. Once that information is verified, the caller is provided instructions on how to obtain financial assistance from the Red Cross. Once assistance is approved, a victim is given instructions on how to obtain that assistance at their closest Western Union branch.

AMINAH RANDLE, ROBERT JOHNSON, ELIZABETH RAY, SHEENA PORTER, DAVID CANDELARIA, MORGAN WINSLOW and MARIETTA SNOWDEN were employed at the Bakersfield Red Cross call center. TRENT JERMAINE PRESLEE, CANDICE BROWN, TONJUA RANDLE, STANLEY LEWIS, MIKO NOBLES, NASHIMA JOHNSON, HAROLD OATS, and MARISELA GONZALEZ were closely associated with someone who was so employed. They were able to obtain false claim information and, using that information, obtain payment from Western Union. United States Attorney Scott emphasized that both the Red Cross and Western Union continue to provide substantial assistance in the investigation and are working diligently to prevent further losses from occurring.

The charged count for each defendant carries a maximum of 20 years in prison and/or a \$250,000 fine.

The charges are only allegations, and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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